

# Fortean Times

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# WHAT 'LAKE MONSTER TRADITIONS' MEANS TO ME

by BOB RICKARD.

"... most of the stories our elders give us and call 'historical' are but dreams when all is done..."  
Hans Christian Andersen. 'The legend of Nürnberg Castle.'

**B**y now you must be aware that I am publishing forteen books [see the back-cover ad]. I want to write about one of them: not a review or critique – which I must leave to someone less closely involved – but about my own feelings as I transformed the rather unattractive 1982 Stanké edition of *Monstres des lacs du Québec* into the embodiment of my own vision of its potential.

Working with its principal author, French folklorist Michel Meurger, was truly an education. With each conversation or exchange of letters I was impressed by his grasp of his material, and the spread of his interests, which take in the latest forteen, UFO and other writings as well as Classical and modern anthropology. Meurger speaks English and a number of European languages – the better to get at European source material – and communicates well the clarity of his thought and the strength of his convictions. In his interpretation of Fort, I would say he was true to the Old Man's spirit.

It was clear from the start that a simple translation of the French–Canadian edition was not going to be enough. When Meurger checked the translation he wanted to make severe revisions to reflect the development of his own thinking in the intervening years. The most drastic changes were the replacement of the introduction with a substantial essay on Scandinavian traditions of lake and sea monsters. The final chapter was replaced by a recapitulation of the main themes and the detailed example of a monster-haunted lake in the homeland of dragons, Switzerland. To this we have added a great many new illustrations, a proper bibliography and index, and a major reorganization of the notes and references.

Inevitably the work will be categorized under the heading of 'cryptozoology', but it is much more than a book about lake monsters, even though Meurger disregards, by heroic single-mindedness, the myriad side-trails into other subjects as he relentlessly chases his

monsters across lakes, oceans, countries, cultures and centuries. Meurger's interest (which extends beyond this book) is in the cultural representation of Nature (the world of natural forces) and man's relationship with them. Meurger restricts his arguments to examples chosen from the single (but multi-faceted) topic of water monsters. Consequently, the book is a compact, powerful exposition of method and philosophy which has much of fundamental importance to say to forteans. It combines both iconoclasm and humanism in the same spirit as Fort. It is a book deep-dyed forteans have been waiting for for a long time.

Of course I'm biased, but I'm sure I would be saying this if *Lake monster traditions (LMT)* were published by someone else. My own forteanism was affected for the better in working on this project, and I want to make sure (and not simply for commercial reasons) that this becomes one of the seminal books of our field of study. I believe it reaches out beyond its chosen subject matter to comment in general upon the relationship between the world as it is conceived and as it is experienced. This Cartesian duality affects the interpretation of almost every type of phenomenon in the forteen view of things, and determines the forms of hypothesizing, including popular or media explanations.

## TROUBLE IN PARADISE

**M**eurger makes a direct assault upon the cozy world of modern cryptozoology that will not endear him to those who cannot see beyond the limits of cryptozoology. They lack the critical apparatus for identifying the folkloristic or mythological elements of a historical description, and the ideological perspective to place these imaginative elements (or motifs) into a cultural perspective. Meurger chooses the example of a sea-serpent sighting by a Norwegian sea-captain, Lorenz von Ferry, in

1746, which is regarded with some credibility in the orthodox transmission from Bishop Pontoppidan to Heuvelmans (via Oudemans) because von Ferry made a deposition to the court at Bergen. In dissecting the account, and others like it, Meurger shows that many of its apparently factual features (or motifs, as the folklorists call them) have antecedents in a strong folk tradition, being formal elements of traditional descriptions of water-monsters. These elements or motifs may be quite ancient, or relatively recent absorptions from another, but equally energized, field of popular culture; they are often context-sensitive, relating to a specific culture at a certain period. To disregard that fact is to risk being led into error.

Meurger accuses modern cryptozoology of interpreting the past literally and in the light of present zoological knowledge. This is equivalent to the errors of von Däniken and his ilk in seeking out the evidence of supposed god-like aliens in antiquity by interpreting it in terms of 20th century space technology (eg. his suggestion that the legend of Ali Baba's cave may have been a garbled record of a visit to some secret alien supplies depot!)

In this sense Meurger is not attempting a theory of nature through which to interpret the past, which is the goal of all kinds of biologists (including cryptozoologists); rather, he addresses a different area: the question of how we see nature. The monsters of the past were heavily invested with contemporary images of natural forces whether they originated in known, misperceived or genuinely unfamiliar animals, and the reporting of such encounters was through the language of the day, with its own specific vocabulary of expressions for anomalous experiences.

We can observe this process when we examine descriptions of the same animal by different cultures or at different periods. Meurger's prime example is the iconography of the walrus, for in pictures we have a peculiarly tangible representation of what people *thought* they saw. In the beginning, as rumour and traveller's tales preceded more direct contact with the beast, it was a generalized conception incorporating parts of many other animals real and imagined. This protean gradually gave way to a more naturalistic monster, conceived as a type of sea-serpent with walrus-like features. By the mid-17th century there were accurate naturalistic drawings of walruses in circulation alongside the fantastic creations [examples are given in *LMT*]. This divergence epitomizes two shaping forces at work, simultaneously, in the cultural normalization of anomalies: one pulls the creature in the direction of an ultimately

unknowable elemental, and the other towards a definitely knowable zoological animal.

When Heuvelmans advises his readers [see his *In the wake of the sea-serpent*, p143] that he will pass over the prolific legends of water-monsters among the American Indians because "unfortunately" they are "so fantastic", we can see that he is aware of the divide but does not know how to deal with it except by rejection. The accounts of the early colonists of the New World, and their descendents, he finds easier to deal with, undoubtedly because they are more amenable to reductive analysis. Meurger's book tries to restore the balance.

Today's cryptozoology seems too ready to accept past testimony about wonderous creatures – such as sea-serpents, dragons, mermaids, etc – at face value. In particular, argues Meurger, cryptozoologists seem easily impressed with testimony that has been made under oath, given in court, or otherwise endorsed by authority, and he gives several examples in which the trappings of legality could lead one to strange conclusions when the situation is judged by today's standards. For example, Meurger discusses the case of a hapless Swedish farmer who was condemned to death for illegal sex with a nature-spirit; and another who notarized a statement that his wife had been abducted by a troll to be used as a midwife. Cases such as these in the judicial arena buttressed the popular belief in succubi, nature spirits and fairy midwives etc – which, as most students of folklore know recur in many cultures – just as Heuvelmans has used, say, the legality of von Ferry's 1746 deposition to enhance its status as evidence of a sea-serpent.

Heuvelmans places his confidence in such evidence because it was solemnly sworn to, and because he finds it "hard to imagine a court of law risking making a fool of itself..." [p104.] In the first place the submission of evidence, however impressively legal, does not constitute proof. For example: the combined testimony of hundreds of thousands of people executed for alleged witchcraft, supported in courts with confessions and the full paraphernalia of the law of the day, do not provide any serious proof of the existence of organized covens of witches. Even if the stamp of judicial approval meant something, why should cryptozoologists accept sea-serpents, asks Meurger, and reject trolls and mermaids, records of which are more numerous in Scandinavian law than the rare appearances, in court, of the sea-serpent? Belief in such twilight creatures was widespread and the courts simply reflected the concerns of ordinary people.

Secondly, according to Meurger's reason-

ing, cryptozoologists select the elements of historical cases which seem 'zoological', and neglect the rest, especially the seemingly absurd or inexplicable. To continue with our example: it seems to have suited Heuvelmans' purpose to extract those naturalistic elements of von Ferry's account which supported his deduction that the vertically undulating creature was some kind of mammal. Yet von Ferry was equally insistent that his creature, which he calls a "snake", had a grey, horse-like head with a white mane - a conjunction of reptilian and equine features which Heuvelmans regards as "fantastic" [p102]. Perhaps it is fantastic after all, but not quite in the way Heuvelmans means (or rather implies, because he never pursues the matter). It is left to Meurger to point out that this same combination of features was known, and used to describe the 'water-horse' throughout Scandinavia and the Celtic world.

Meurger meets head-on the elements of absurdity in narratives of encounters with water monsters; on; and what he has to say illuminates other subjects, such as the close encounters of ufology. For example he discusses at length a sober sighting of a mermaid who held a fish aloft, motionless, for 2½ hours, and another of a veritable Neptune with coiffeured hair. Such surreality is a sure sign that these encounters might more properly belong to a state which includes the extremes of dreams and religious visions, than to the relatively modern tradition of precise observation.

As a word of caution, I must say that Meurger does not explain such cases in terms of an occult phenomenology (ie. phantoms, etc), nor as simple hallucinations. The perceived monster is, nevertheless, the product of our ability to fantasize creatively, individually or collectively, given the appropriate stimulus or trigger. (I will return to this below.) Our interpretation of reality, as we experience it, is influenced closely by our preconceptions and expectations of the moment.

## A WILD SWEDISH MONSTER HUNT

**E**xamples abound in current fortan events, but I'd like to put the spotlight on the wild goose chases in Swedish coastal waters, which seem to be an annual event of collective absurdity. They involve reports of mystery submarines which the navy can detect but are unable to catch or damage by nets or depth-charges. In other words these USOs (unidentified submarine objects) behave very like the mysterious UFOs that taunt and evade our most sophisticated radar. There are sometimes reports of invading 'frogmen' too, which

usually turn out to be based only on rumour. Such baffling behaviour rather scuttled the too-easy conclusion that these were secret Soviet subs violating Swedish territory.

In FT42 (p7f) we gave a very brief summary of the 1983 flap and its precursors, and drew attention to two possible analyses: the 'mystery sub' as a variant of the UFO, and as a suitably modern disguise for the ancient water monster. Meurger's book is sensibly sensitive to both interpretations, and as he points out, a literal interpretation by cryptozoologists or ufologists would miss the wealth of cultural meaning gained from perceiving the 'mystery sub' as but the latest manifestation of a living traditional expression which has long local roots.

Last June (1987), the Swedish Navy went on alert after 20 people reported seeing a 'periscope' in the Töre Bay, not far from Stockholm. Our Swedish correspondent Sven Rosén takes up the story: "In mid-July, one navy spokesman said that they had been chasing 'minor submarine objects' (which were not fish or seals), which seemed to appear in a number of places at the same time... Evidently the military are embarrassed because they don't know what they are chasing: subs, dwarf subs, or miniature dwarf subs!"

"A local newspaper, *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*, on 29 July, stated that a foreign frogman had been shot and wounded but that he 'dived back into the sea, bleeding'. The claim was immediately denied by the defence staff, although they now admit that some machine-guns had been fired during an incident. In many ways the hunt at Töre parallels the sub-chase at Karlskrona in 1984, in which a local newspaper reported that a dead black-clad frogman had been found and taken to the town's morgue. This too was denied by defence staff at the time. Both newspapers claimed they received their information from high-ranking officers involved in the hunts. *Norrländska Socialdemokraten* even claimed to have spoken to the officer who fired the bullets at the latest mystery frogman. In Karlskrona in 1984, however, the defence staff admitted that soldiers had been shooting at what they *believed* were 'foreign frogmen'. Heaven only knows what they were firing at! Evidently no bodies were found."

"At Töre, the local fishermen complain that the depth-charges, grenades and other explosives, dropped to flush out the mystery subs, have ruined their fishing grounds, said to be the world's best spawning ground for *Löja* (which could mean any one of three kinds of fish in English, and which is also slang for 'ridiculousness' or 'absurdity'. Exactly right in

this case.) The result of the Töre hunt was summed up by the newspaper *SDS* on 21 July: 138 blasts, but no blasted sub!"

Clearly the logical, literal nuts-and-bolts hypothesis of an invading sub could not adequately account for the paradoxical facts of the case, even allowing for the elaborations of rumour. At this point, Sven Rosén rightly widens the discussion. "In any century previous to the 20th, I have no doubt that the blame would have fallen upon *Näcken*, the 'water-man' of Scandinavian tradition (a 'frog-man'?), who could also appear as *Bäckahäst*, a water-horse, or in the guise of a drifting log or an upturned boat."

The water-horse is also a favourite form of the Celtic lake and sea monster, which is fully explored in Meurger's book, and its manifestations as a living-log or the keel of an upturned boat are used by Meurger to establish the continuity of the lake monster tradition throughout the northern hemisphere, as examples can be found at almost every lake with a monster tradition.

Sven continues: "As a water-horse, the *Näcken* was usually white; but as a water-man, the *Bäckahäst* was black, or entirely naked. (His clothing could, of course, vary. He was often dressed in clothes which were 'modern' for those days, so why shouldn't he be seen in a modern frogman's outfit today?)" The nakedness of this water spirit might itself provoke the immediate association with a diver's wet-suit, allowing the traditional perception of this mythic being to find an up-to-date expression, and thus live on in the local culture."

"The *Näcken* was one of the most widespread and popular beings in old Swedish folklore, and was traditionally regarded as a boundary guardian, so it seems natural," writes Sven, "for him to show himself at places wherethere has always been a boundary or border of some kind. The idea that modern submarine and frogman sightings could be a contemporary expression of traditional *Näcken* lore was first (?) brought up in the newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* a few years ago by folklorist Dr Jochum Stattin, who wrote his thesis on the *Näcken* as a boundary guardian." It comes as little surprise then to realise that Töre is close to the border with Finland, and that the concerns over invasion amount to a territorial anxiety.

If I may be permitted to indulge in extrapolation myself, I would suggest that this line of reasoning makes good sense of what would otherwise be dismissed as inconsequential absurdity or mere superstition. What plainer symbol can we have of the modern environmen-

tal tragedy than that the *genius locii* of these once fertile breeding waters, evicted from his element by pollution and depth-bombs, should be found dying on the shore – or that, when faced with his angry, reminding presence (interpreted as a threat), this ancient personification of natural order or equilibrium is shot at!

## THE EVOLUTION OF MONSTERS

**O**n a more profound level, the arrival of the sub and diver (or water-man) may be nothing less than a dramatized message from the psychic underworld drawing attention to the dangerous distancing of Western man from his own nature and from Nature itself. (This conclusion can also be drawn from the UFO and abduction enigma.) Which brings us back to Meurger's underlying concern with man's perception of the natural world and his role in it, and how this shows itself in culturally conditioned images – such as nature spirits, demonic elementals, monsters and other personifications of non-human natural forces with which archaic man has had to deal. In this context the *Näcken* is the guardian of that twilight frontier between the objective and the subjective, the conscious and the unconscious, the intellectual and the experiential, and the mundane and the magical.

The attributes of these entities are not arbitrary, but, as Meurger demonstrates, are transformed elements of earlier stages in the perception of the monster and its description in terms of the cultural images and preoccupations of the day. He gives several detailed examples in which the earliest form of the local monster was a vague, almost supernatural entity with protean characteristics, having a repertoire of ways in which it could manifest itself. In its intermediate period, the monster is perceived as a strange but naturalistic creature. In its modern stage the legendary creature is judged to be one which has not yet been discovered or scientifically described. This evolution, argues Meurger, corresponds closely to its cultural milieu, beginning with the archaic magical world view, through the awakening of the natural sciences in the Renaissance period, to the scientific-experimental mentality dominant today.

This development of the conception of the monster is critical to the book's main argument. To borrow one of Meurger's references from his introductory essay, W-E Peuckert, writing in the 1940s, observed this trend in the naturalization of dragons: they were once considered to be theriomorphic demons, but since the 16th



century were increasingly seen as cryptozoological beasts. It is this process in general – the cultural accommodation of natural and experiential anomalies – which is additionally demonstrated by changes in the descriptions of ‘UFOs’ through historical ages to the present.

Some ufologists, like some cryptozoologists, see their chosen field as a *fait accompli*, complete in itself and free of ‘outside’ influences. It is surely a complex belief system, like many others, in the process of evolving, probably in several directions at once. We have mentioned one of these already, and narrow-minded ufologists will find it very disturbing that their precious extraterrestrials can be traced by folklorists, through the murky waters haunted by USOs, to the water-monsters of rural folk and sailors. Another current takes us back through apparitional encounters with religious and occult entities to elemental entities such as fairies and spirits, as suggested by John Michell in his unsung *Flying saucer vision*, two years before Jacques Vallée popularized the Good People connection in his *Passport to Magonia* (1970). Yet another current integrates the UFO myth with the dangerous and mysterious world of shamanistic and paranormal events, as in Meurger’s account of the Québec loggers, terrified by the Amer-Indian myths of the ‘Flying Canoe’ piloted by demonic shamans; their anxiety became the nexus for mysterious disappearances, strange sights and sounds, poltergeist phenomena, and a fairy-world under a lake.

## THE MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

In today’s society, dominated by materialism in many guises, there is a subtle pressure on everybody to opt for belief or disbelief. These two extremes determine most of the explanations and theorizing, and their consequences are often appalling in their narrow-mindedness. Meurger makes a plea for a middle path, a stepping back, as it were, for a fresh perspective. The case of the Rendlesham ‘UFO’ may serve as an example.

This complicated case – amply explored in Jenny Randles’ *Sky crash* (Neville Spearman, 1984) – centres upon allegations that USAF personnel investigating lights in this Suffolk forest in December 1980 encountered a luminous craft and its crew. Sceptics, however, argue that the lights were “nothing more than” misperceptions of a satellite, lights on a radio-mast, lights on a patrolling police car, and the beam of the Orford Ness lighthouse. Instead of choosing between the reductive-analytical and the experiential-creative explanations the

Fortean should recognize the spectrum between real-time events (which may well have their origin in mundane causes) and the anomalous in which the experiences take on the form and content of a close encounter. Proponents of either extreme use its opposite as the reason why they remain unconvinced. The UFO apologists cannot accept that the significance they invest in the case and its details could be reduced so drastically to a “nothing more than” solution, because their commitment is to a world-view in which there is, indeed, “something more”. The sceptics, on the other hand, cannot accept what they see as unnecessary complications beyond mundane, if misperceived, origins. They are separated by a chasm of ideological differences, not by the lack of data. Fort himself commented upon the difference between belief and factuality when he wrote: “It is not necessary that a gamekeeper should kill a luminous owl, and so put an end to a mystery. A story that he did will serve just as well.”

There is another, intermediate, viewpoint in which both extremes could be reconciled (partially, of course). This position is classically Fortean, but has developed spontaneously in ufology in recent years in response to the need to evaluate the absurd aspects of so-called ‘high strangeness’ cases. It is increasingly recognized that startling misperceptions can be triggered by the most ordinary phenomena under special circumstances: eg. a celebrated example is of the woman who mistook the moon for a UFO to the extent of seeing windows on it and its crew inside. Surely both versions of the moon can be regarded as ‘real’, each in their appropriate world-view? In my view this need not involve investing them with equal reality, because they are the products of two different ways of seeing. There may be many other ways of seeing – read Lawrence LeShan on this subject.

One governing factor seems to be the psychological state of the witness in which the most mundane perceptions can be misconstrued if they are unexpected or (wrongly?) judged odd at a critical moment: for example a sudden light which intrudes into a reverie during a monotonous motorway journey. The cover of *LMT* [also featuring on the cover of this issue] is intended to represent that spooky moment on a mist-shrouded lake in the wilderness when an unexpected swirl of the still water, or the looming of an old tree trunk, plunges the already dissociated witness into a fearful imagining. As Shakespeare mused: “How easy is a bush seen as a bear...”

The other factor, as these examples make clear, is the imagery added to the event by the

witnesses' mind. To me, at least, this suggests that we must also study (and never underestimate) the creative powers of the human imagination. This has also been one of the conclusions of Hilary Evans' grand collation of apparitional and visionary experiences - *Visions, apparitions, alien visitors* (1984), and *Gods, spirits, cosmic guardians* (1987), both by Aquarian Press. The old dismissal, that "It's all in the mind", may turn out to be substantially true after all. But it is obviously not the whole story, just as reductionism cannot account for the form and content of the subjective component of the experience, nor its psychic impact. (This is especially true of experiences which have altered the witness's life or personality, of which Saul's illumination on the road to Tarsus is a well-known example.) For these factors we have to turn to psychology in all its branches, and to the folklorists and cultural anthropologists who are to society as a whole what psychologists are to the individual.

Our understanding of an unusual experience, which may involve the subjective interpretation by the witness of both internal and external events, must take account of its physical, psychological and cultural context, all three of which - there may be others we have yet to identify - are in constant and intimate interaction in the body and mind of the witness and in his relationship with his culture. When the military investigators of the mysterious lights in Rendlesham forest entered those dark and isolated woods in a state of expectant anxiety, and in the culturally-informed suspicion that the weird lights might be UFOs, they crossed over to the mythological landscape (to use Meurger's phrase). In this hypnoid state, the creative power of the imagination, which is more associative than analytical, draws its raw material from both the internal and the external world and weaves them into a fantasy experienced as reality. [Did those involved at Rendlesham know of the 12th century tale of alien encounter at Orford? Although known as 'The Wild Man of Orford', the strange creature which resembled a man was found on the sea shore and was believed at the time to be a merman, and kept imprisoned until one day he escaped to the sea. The event was recorded by Ralph of Coggeshal in the 13th century. Abbot Ralph is also one of the main sources for the famous Suffolk visitation of little green people, known as 'The Green Chidren of Woolpit'.]

I am, frankly, not surprised that there are bitter arguments over the reality of witnesses' experiences. The impasse seems formidable until we abandon those extreme either/or positions. Most Fortean phenomena are ambiguous,

and I think it is significant that they are often dream-like events. Perhaps they are special forms of 'reality' which bridge the internal and external worlds, inner-space's equivalent of the 'worm-holes' or 'singularities' of interstellar astronomy in which paradoxical physical events are known to occur. Like Jung, I will draw back from attempting an explanation of how psychic images may be externalized or manifest in the everyday realm of physicality. This is another great mystery we have to address, but again, I think it significant that there are types of external phenomena (like stigmata, firewalking, levitation, rapid healing, some poltergeistery etc) directly related to an internal state of mind. Because of their paradoxical nature, I sometimes liken Fortean phenomena to the Taoists' 'Uncarved Block'. They are like fragments of a primal reality, pregnant with a myriad of possible manifestations, before they are whittled and polished into intelligible shape by the way we process our perceptions and expectations. If this sounds mystical, so be it.

Diehard sceptics - typified by the CSICOPs - will prefer the devil they know, coldly comforted by their inadequate reductions and "single vision". They reject all these phenomena and think, therefore, that there is no case for them at all. Why, I wonder, do they bother so much? What does it matter whether they trounce some spoonbender in the act of manhandling his cutlery or not? Their so-called 'exposé' does nothing to explain the will to believe, the forms belief takes, or the meaningful aspects of the most bizarre subjective experience. They make a weak appeal to Piaget's theory of 'magical thinking', and then they turn away from the inescapable fact that magical thinking is not confined to childhood, but is still an active principle in the adult world, in the world which is supposed to be governed by scientific laws and materialistic pragmatism.

Recall that Meurger found the evolution of monsters corresponded to the transition from the archaic-magical world to the magical-naturalistic and then to the scientifically naturalistic. We can propose another correspondence in the development of the individual: from the 'magical' thought of babyhood, through the confusion of adolescence, to the cynicism of adulthood. But we know from experience that this process is not inevitable; not all adults are cynical, analytical materialists. Archaic modes of thought are not eradicated, but merely suppressed; in the human they pass into the subconscious. I think it must be pretty much the same with whole cultures. The mythological landscape is closer to most people than the CSICOPs like to think,

precisely because its domain is internal rather than external.

## THE SCIENCE OF FOLKLORE OR THE FOLKLORE OF SCIENCE?

I used to assume, unquestioningly, that our Fortean work has a definite relationship to the evolution of science; that as science trundled onward more and more of our subjects would pass from our amateur study into the full glare of institutional research by professional scientists. While we Forteans lack the funds and facilities of the professionals (and *ipso facto* are condemned as amateurs) we are little more than caretakers of our chosen subjects.

The error here, of course, is in believing the so-called progress of science to be inexorable, that it will devour every subject indiscriminately in its ravenous appetite for knowledge until, in the far distant future, scientists would "know everything" including the mysteries of human perversity. Old age has put some perspective on this for me: understanding of Fortean phenomena does not come merely through data acquisition, nor does usefulness depend upon developing a technology based upon that knowledge.

One of the most difficult tasks facing Forteans is to articulate that sense of meaningfulness that we detect in the phenomena we study. I used to think that the leads, in methodology and philosophy, would come from the direction of science, but Meurger's book demonstrates to me conclusively that we might be better off looking to folklorists and cultural anthropologists for this guidance.

In Fortean studies, as in many other areas of amateur expertise, there is a subtle pressure for us to become more like the professionals if we wish ourselves to be 'taken seriously' by them. Like many, I have in the past assumed the only choice was to become more *scientific* in our methodology, reporting and allegiances. We cannot hope that science will become less dogmatic or even more inclusive, because dogmatism and specialization are the big guns of its authority. Nor can we hope that science will meet us half-way in the matter of evidence. Most of our subjects will still be regarded as heresy by many scientists long after they come within the pale of science, just as, say, psychology, is still regarded with suspicion by hard-line scientists, and probably for the same reason. Perhaps worst of all is that science seems to have little to say about the territory we want to explore, and precious little in the way of guidance about *how* to explore.

The folklorists and cultural an-

thropologists, to the contrary, have, for decades, been grappling with a phenomenology fairly similar in complexity to that displayed by Fortean subjects.

The central phenomena of almost any folk tradition may have characteristics which are seemingly of this world and others which are more ephemeral, dreamlike, mythical, paranormal or even 'supernatural'. To emphasise one aspect over the others, or to argue from an isolated position condemning the others, is an exercise in futility. In Fort's terms these are attempts to account for the universal by accepting only the local. Folklore accounts or narratives are judged to be the product of many forces: physical, social, political, economic, geographical, historical, cultural, psychological, mythical and religious (to name the most obvious), not the least among these being the sheer creativity of the human imagination.

This is something Forteans are only just beginning to realise about their subject matter, just as sensible ufologists have already done on their own patch. For example the social role of the Congo's *mokele mbembe* monster has been ignored by all the expeditions to Lake Tele so far, who have been fascinated by the idea of a flesh-and-blood survivor from prehistory. Only as an aside in conversation with Operation Congo member Mark Rothermel – see FT47 p24 – do we get a hint that the *mokele mbembe* might be something *more* than a mere monster, for the natives attribute magical powers to the monster which is blamed for all sorts of bad luck.

I am not suggesting that Forteans should now turn away from science and embrace cultural anthropology or comparative folklore, but that we learn from *both*. What I find exciting is that Meurger has given us another alternative to the dominant (science); one which permits a really functional dialectic. Fortean phenomena, for the most part, bridge the inner (psychic, mythic, acausal, subjective) and the outer (physical, everyday, causal, objective) worlds. We learn from the New Physics that the act of perceiving the 'external' world actually distorts it – now, studies like Meurger's show the same is going on with our perception of our cultural environment. Forteans could develop that middle ground. We need to bring meaningfulness and humanity to the collection and analysis of mere data, and on the other hand we must boldly explore the possibility of paranormal intervention in everyday physicality (eg: the physical traces of 'impossible' UFOs, thoughtography, controlled evolution, do statues weep real tears?, etc).

I look forward to an era of exciting bridge-building.



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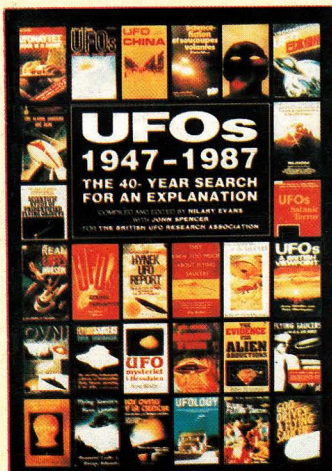
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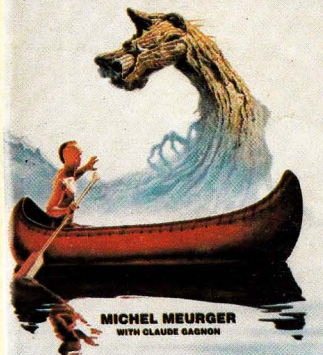
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